

Rev. Kenneth Moales, Jr. Appropriations Committee Testimony, Feb. 21st

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, honored committee members, good evening.

My name is Rev. Kenneth Moales Jr. I am the pastor of Bridgeport's Cathedral of the Holy Spirit and a member of the Bridgeport Board of Education. I thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of Governor Malloy's education budget proposal.

I believe that every parent has the right to public school choice. And while thousands of parents are demanding it, we're not doing a good job of providing it.

My own story is an example of the power of choice. My life changed drastically for the better when I had the opportunity to attend a school of choice. I was able to attend a school that not only nourished my intellect, but also demanded excellence from me and my peers everyday.

I and 26 other individuals in this state submitted letters of intent, telling the Department of Education that we hope to launch new public charter schools in our communities. I did so in the hope I could offer today's students the same advantage I was afforded.

As it stands, Connecticut has the worst achievement gap in the nation and Bridgeport is home to the lowest-performing school district in the state of Connecticut, with 96 percent of the city's schools performing below state average.

My proposed Bridgeport Prestige Academy would prepare young men in grades 3-8 for admission to and success in demanding college preparatory high schools.

Charter schools in Connecticut are all public, nonprofit schools, in which any child may enroll. The only real limitation is that there aren't enough seats to meet the demand of parents.

I have seen first-hand the good charter schools have done in Bridgeport. I've seen those schools change the lives of people in my congregation. Bridgeport, like other schools districts within Connecticut, should provide students and parents with more options.

The thousands of children currently on waitlists, praying that they will gain admission to a high-quality school, should not have to wait any longer. That indicates clearly that we should increase the supply of good, neighborhood-based schools in our communities.

My mother once told me, 'If you think that education is expensive try ignorance!' We can't afford for our kids to be uneducated. The status quo is failing Bridgeport students, and something must change. If things don't change more and more African-American and Latino children will fall through the cracks of a broken education system. My math tells that spending money on education reform is the smartest investment we can make. Now is the time to invest in our children.

Thank you for your time.